

\$3m plea for computers

By Caroline Hughes

THE Education Department will ask the Finance Committee for an extra \$3 million to fund two computer-based subjects in the Form 6 curriculum.

Director of Education, Li Yuet-ting, speaking at a conference on computer education yesterday, said the new subjects would be Advanced Level computer studies and Advanced Supplementary Level computer applications.

The additional funds would be used to buy new computers for schools offering these subjects.

A syllabus for each subject had been completed and endorsed by the Curriculum Development Council and the Hongkong Examinations Authority, Mr Li said.

"Our investment in this respect will be enormous," he said.

Opening the conference on "Computer Education in a Decade of Transformation," Mr Li said the Education Department was "fully committed to the promotion of computer education" in schools.

Teaching on the subject began with 30 schools in 1982 and has since been extended to over 90 per cent of the territory's secondary institutions.

Under the Computer Education in Special Schools Project, which began in 1989, a total of 39 special schools would have micro-computers — many with adaptive devices — by this September, Mr Li said.

"These special schools are now offering computer-assisted learning, computer literacy, computer studies as well as the use of computers as a communications and rehabilitation tool," he said.

Another speaker, Professor Cheng Yiu-chung, director of the City Polytechnic, criticised the lack of post-graduate scholars in computing.

Prof Cheng said Hongkong was suffering from a serious lack of computer professionals and scholars "capable of pursuing



■ Li Yuet-ting ... for computers.

research with independence and initiative".

Because the value of such people was not immediately recognised they did not obtain adequate funds to pursue their research work, he said.

"While Hongkong has only a handful of such scholars South Korea and Taiwan have several hundred," he said.

"In these two countries, graduates of MPhil or PhD programmes have a lucrative career in industry.

"In Hongkong, the only career open to them is in the academic line," he said.

The low number of MPhil and PhD computing graduates would only be recognised as a problem in several years' time, when it was too late, Prof Cheng said.

Information technology was increasingly important for today's white-collar worker who had access to more information than ever before, he said.

Education, both in and out of the work place, was vitally important if companies were to benefit from these "knowledge workers", Prof Cheng said.

But educating such workers by human teachers was impracticable, he said.

"Self-learning is the only possible solution. Computers will play an important role," he said.